

HIDDEN TREASURE

By
DAVID WHITELAW

Synopsis of Previous Chapters.

VIVIAN RENTON and Eddie Haverton, modern soldiers of fortune, have been gambling with Hubert Baxenter, a prosperous attorney, in his London apartments. After their departure late at night Renton returns to the house, murders Baxenter and hides the body on the roof. While waiting for night to come again in order to make his escape, he finds in a desk a curious old yellowed document telling of a mysterious chest left in the care of one of Baxenter's ancestors by a French nobleman, the Marquis de Dartigny, of the Chateau Chauville. The chest has been handed down from one generation of Baxenters to another and carefully guarded in the hope that some day its rightful owner will be found. Renton decides to pose as the missing heir and claim the chest. He goes to France to make some useful inquiries about the Dartigny family.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

CHAPTER IV.—Writing the Will.

It will be necessary to relive for a few moments some of the exciting events that happened at the time of the Revolution, those strangely troubled days when the fair land of France was so deeply soaked with the blood of its own patriotic "citizens." In this way the most important details of the oddly mysterious bequest entrusted to Adam Baxenter by the white-haired old aristocrat, Marquis de Dartigny, can be more fully understood.

So, while Vivian is leaning back on the cushions of his carriage wondering who is to be the next to enter into the possession of the murdered man's Regent Park house and the offices in the Strand, let us listen to the song of the Revolution, shouted at the top of a tuneless and wine-laden voice, which sounded raucously from behind the red-curtained bay window of the "Star of Navarre," in the city of Blois. Floating out into the still courtyard, it polluted the calm of the Spring evening and caused a traveller who had but that moment climbed, stiff-legged down from the saddle, to bite his under lip in irritation and to lead his mount into the shadow of a farm wagon which stood by the gateway leading to the stables.

There was no hostler at hand to attend to the animal; but Remy Perancourt had ridden far and the horse needed no restraining hand on his bridle, but stood there with steaming neck outstretched to nibble at a few poor ears of corn which showed at the tail-board of the cart.

Remy advanced cautiously to the vine-framed window. The song had now ceased and had given place to oath-interrupted laughter. The man in the courtyard, his body well screened against any sudden surprise from the room he was watching, availed himself of a small aperture in the blind—for it was the Spring of 1793, a time when man looked with suspicion on man, and when it were well to move warily and act with an infinite caution.

It was but a small portion of the apartment of the "Star of Navarre" that was visible, but it showed enough for Remy to draw back with a muttered curse. Seated at the head of the black oak table was a man, bearded and very dirty. On the board before him, papers and documents were mixed with the remains of a meal and with empty wine flasks.

More noteworthy still was the curious assortment of weapons spread over the person of the sinister-looking individual himself. From the pocket of the great coat which was hung over the back of his chair a small blunderbuss showed its stock; in a belt at his waist two other firearms were ready to hand, whilst a porguard and a stiletto, in their nakedness, kept the other weapons company.

Remy did not need to raise his eyes from this arsenal to the evil face to know that he was looking at the infamous Herat, the devilish factotum of the Committee of General Safety, the friend and confidant of Robespierre, the wretch to whom nothing was sacred and who spared neither friends nor family so that his fatal lists be filled and Madame Guillotine be not kept waiting.

Often had he seen the armoured figure of the "ferret of the Marais quarter," and he knew well the man's cowardice, how in addition to his superfluity of weapons he never moved without a bodyguard of armed ruffians, eager and ready to do the bidding of their hideous master.

Remy could not, from his peep-hole in the blind, see how many the man had with him now, but he judged from the sound and from the shadows that flashed at intervals across the wall and the blind, that they numbered at least half a dozen, and he fell back to where his tired horse, with drooping neck, nearly slept in the shadow of the cart.

Remy stroked the moist mane and, holding the nostrils to prevent a possible neigh, led the poor spent beast across the cobbles and through the stone archway to the street. He gave a glance behind him to see that all was quiet, then mounted and, taking the way that lay southward, left the city by the Barrier d'Artois.

The plains of Touraine stretched out gray to the horizon in a level monotony, and the little marshy lakes reflected the glory of the setting sun. Behind the horseman the towers and minarets of the city showed a delicate tracery against the evening sky and from some belfry a peal of bells sounded. Once free of the city, Remy had allowed the bridle to slip unheeded upon the mane and was letting his horse make his own pace, whilst the rider gave himself up to speculation on why it was that Herat, the friend of the Terror and daily companion of Fouquier-Tinville, should be so far from Paris.

He knew that the Convention was in the habit of sending out pro-consuls to spy upon the doings of the provincial tribunals, but he did not remember having heard that Blois had a tribunal. He told himself that it must be the biggest of game that could draw Herat away from the happy hunting ground of the capital, and he cursed him roundly for his presence at the "Star of Navarre."

For the last two hours Remy had been promising himself the comfort of wine and supper, a comfort not easily understood save by those who have spent twenty hours in the saddle, and his horse had doubtless, in his own way, had very similar thoughts. And now, to be forced into the remaining two miles of his journey—which he had intended to resume, refreshed, in the morning—was not pleasant. Besides, the little hamlet of Massey, which was his destination, boasted but a poor rest for travellers—and they would not be expecting him at the Chateau de Chauville until the morrow. On second thought, however, Remy told himself that Herat's presence in Blois complicated matters, and his errand, which hitherto had seemed to call for no undue haste, now took on a new and more sinister significance.

So deep in thought was he that the distance seemed covered in less time than he had imagined possible, and raising his eyes he was surprised to see the little cluster of red roofs nestling among the foliage of the chestnut trees, and which, with the church, composed the village of Massey.

The house lying back from the road and showing the sign of the "Three Lilies" was a poor enough substitute for the "Star of Navarre," but, to the saddle-weary man, it at least promised rest and refreshment. As he pulled up before the low doorway some peasants, who were taking their thin wine on a bench outside, looked up curiously.

Remy Perancourt smiled grimly as he dismounted. Time was when these men would have sprung up, hat in hand, to do him service; now—well, it was the turn of the people and why should they leave their wine to hold the bridle of a stranger who, like enough, was an aristocrat and an enemy of the glorious Revolution that was to do so much for them and theirs?

There was little of the aristocrat showing in Perancourt, as, travel-stained and dirty, he tied his horse to a ring let into the post of the door and made his way inside the house. Jacques, the landlord—whose great difficulty in these times was to restrain from addressing his guests as "monsieur" and from bowing low before them—met him in the passage.

"Er—Citizen Perancourt, is it not? You are from Paris?"
"Yes, Jacques—I beg pardon, Citizen Jacques. Today France groans under the 'citizen' curse. Oh, I don't mind!" as the innkeeper, putting his fingers to his lips, nodded in the direction of the



"The next moment Remy, his hand pressed tightly over the victim's mouth, was binding the arms of the servant of the Republic."

trinking peasants, "nothing seems to matter now. Our heads are sure to drop, however we act. Since the citizen patriots arrested the citizen king and as many of his citizen family as they could lay their citizen hands on, we citizen soldiers of August the 16th have been in hiding. Faugh! 'Citizens'—I can smell them here. Give me some of your best, landlord, to take away the taste."

The traveller paused to drink the wine which his host poured out, then he added in a lower tone:

"The Marquis de Dartigny—is he at the chateau?"

"He was yesterday. You are going there, citizen?—you have news of his son? He was one of those who defended the Tuileries, was he not?" Then, as Remy nodded over his glass: "News takes long to reach here. What think you they will do with the que—with Citoyenne Capet?"

For answer Remy took up a knife from the table, and, poised it horizontally, let it fall edgewise on the board. He rose with a little laugh.

"As for the young seigneur, as one of the officers of the Petit Peres he is 'suspect.' It does not do for any of the defenders of the Tuileries to show face in Paris. You and I, landlord—we who are such staunch supporters of the Revolution—have nothing to fear." Remy solemnly winked at Jacques as he spoke and finished his wine. "I can leave my horse here, I suppose—I will likely sleep at the chateau."

Remy Perancourt stepped out along the uneven road, turning off into a narrower track, which, threading a little wood, led to the bridge which spanned the moat of the Chateau de Chauville, the conical roofs of whose towers he had seen above a clump of poplars from the door of the inn. The mansion stood mysterious in the pale light of the newly risen moon, its white towers, ivy covered and discolored with age, showing faithfully in the placid depths of the moat, where lily leaves made green patches on the surface and two swans seemed to hang motionless upon the water.

The man crossed the bridge and looked in at the little lodge flanked with its towers, tiny counterparts of those of the building itself. A sleepy servant took his message and a few moments later Remy was

ushered into the great dining hall of the castle.

Dinner was over, but wine and a dish of fruit still remained upon the polished oak of the long table. A small fire had been lighted on the massive hearth and shone upon the features of an elderly man who rose from an arm-chair as his visitor entered.

"Ah! Remy, I am glad to see you; but Gaspard's letter said to-morrow—I am afraid you will not find us ready." He smiled a little as he spoke. "You see, in these times we do not entertain much."

He turned and pulled a silken bell-rope, and, to the servant who answered his summons, made arrangements for the guest-chamber to be prepared and for a meal to be served at once. He motioned Remy into a chair facing him.

"Yes, Remy, I'm glad to see you—glad, and perhaps a little frightened. One never knows what to expect in these days. You have left Gaspard well?"

"Quite, Monsieur le Marquis—and safe. Oh! he is a man to be proud of, he—and the work he is doing back there in Paris. He is in the thick of the fight, running with the hare and with the hounds, and ever helping the hares. Many a condemned prisoner has found himself at liberty through Gaspard's good offices, and Sanson has been cheated of many heads. He fights the tribunal with its own weapons, and some of its most influential members have gone to the guillotine on evidence gleaned or manufactured by Citizen Gabriel, as your son calls himself when with the 'hounds.' Then he is a friend

of Couthon and visits Bezon, who engraves the forged passports. You can understand, sir, how it is impossible for him to come to you. Luckily, his name was published among those officers of the Petit Peres who fell on the 10th of August—in that lies his safety—so far as it is believed."

The entrance of the servant prevented further speech, and, even when the meal was cleared away, the old man sat silent. Whilst his visitor had been eating the nobleman had taken from his pocket the letter he had received from his son the day before. He had read it through, and now he sat, the paper hanging limply from his fingers, gazing into the flames.

Remy leant back in his chair and watched the firelight play shadow tricks upon the shapely features of his host. The heavy wooden shutters had been barred across the windows, and a candelabra of three branches shed an oasis of light over the fruit and decanters. The remote corners of the splendid room were in deep shadow, in which loomed the indistinct shapes of furniture and the dull gleam of mirrors. Portraits of dead and gone owners of the chateau looked down from the panelled walls as though wondering what had become of the gay revellers of their own time, and why it was that the hall of the Dartignys was so desolate. Two firelight flickered upon the tarnished frames, and here and there was the cold sheen of armor.

"The Marquis looked up suddenly. 'You must forgive me, Monsieur Perancourt. I was thinking.' He tapped the letter with a white and

tapering forefinger, "and I was wondering, too, at this. Did Gaspard tell you what he wants me to do?"

Remy Perancourt nodded.

"I understood that I am to see that you and your granddaughter reach Pecamp in safety. We of Gaspard's band obey his orders implicitly. I have arranged—"

The old aristocrat held up a protesting hand.

"Over fast, my young sir, you go over fast. I am under no oath of obedience to my own son. Under stand me, I will not leave the Chateau de Chauville."

"But, Monsieur le Marquis, you do not appreciate the—"

"I appreciate enough to know that I will not be driven from my home by a pack of wolves. Besides, my people round here love me; I have no fear of them. They will not forget the corn I have distributed among them in their lean years, the rents I have refused to accept from them. I in danger from my peasants? It is absurd!"

Perancourt sat looking into the fire for a few moments, then he rose and faced the Marquis de Dartigny, into whose pale cheeks a tinge of color had come.

"It is hateful to me," Remy said at last, "to dispel illusions, but my duty is clear. You, who have lived your life in these peaceful solitudes can have only a very slight idea of what is taking place back there in Paris. It is not your peasants you have to fear. When I tell you that at this moment one of the bloodiest of the Terrorists is sitting drinking at the 'Star of Navarre' in Blois, perhaps you will allow that Gaspard and myself are acting rightly."

Remy paused. Perhaps he expected an answer; but the Marquis sat silent, his eyes fixed on the speaker's face.

"Perhaps, Monsieur le Marquis, the name of Herat conveys nothing to you; to us who know him it spells all that is hellish in human, or, rather, inhuman, nature. This man is the friend of Fouquier-Tinville; it is he who prepares the fatal lists for the daily sittings in the Maison de Justice. Your son

knows the names which appear—"

"You mean that my name—"

"I mean that your enemies are active, and that they are at your very door. Do you imagine that your gifts of corn have been acceptable to all? What of the monopolists in the city of Blois, those devils who hope to make fortunes out of the famine and sufferings of the people? Believe me, the crops will be watered with blood before the people eat their fill. This is the time when the young must teach the old, when youth must—"

The door of the dining-hall flew open, there was a patter of tiny bare feet, and a small person of some four summers precipitated herself, between tears and laughter, into the arms of the old nobleman. From her grandparental sanctuary she glanced defiantly at her nurse, a sober-faced daughter of Albion, who stood, hesitating, at the door.

"She is naughty, Monsieur le Marquis; she will not sleep. It is Pierre at the lodge—he tells her stories of Paris and—"

Two roseleaf hands crept up and caressed the thin cheeks of the old man, and blue eyes full of a sleepy terror looked through the masses of golden curls into his. And the Marquis de Dartigny folded the little night-clad figure in his arms and signed to the nurse.

"Leave the little maid with me, Susan; she is frightened at what the wicked Pierre tells her." He patted the little rounded shoulder. "He is a wicked one, that Pierre, Sylvia; and to-morrow I will give him to the giant who takes away the naughty people who tell stories—"

With such childish comfortings he soothed the motherless child until the small figure relaxed and the little blue-veined feet dropped like faded lilies, still and slender in the firelight.

The Marquis bent his head and pressed his lips to the shining curls and looked up over them at the man in the chair opposite him.

"I have changed my mind, Remy."

(Continued on Next Page)